



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: Sept. 17, 2002 (02-50)  
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## **WSDA meets with organic industry to discuss potential organic food commission**

OLYMPIA – A work group assembled by the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to examine the possibility of forming an organic food commission is scheduled to meet in Ellensburg Sept. 26. WSDA was directed by the Legislature during the last session to evaluate the feasibility of forming the commission and to report findings to the Legislature in December. The meeting, which is open to the public, is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Hal Holmes Center, 201 N Ruby. A public comment period begins at 3:30 p.m.

The Organic Food Commission Work Group includes organic producers and members of commodity commissions. According to Miles McEvoy, manager of WSDA's Organic Food Program, the group will evaluate procedures that could be used to establish a commission, review current commission programs that benefit organic producers, and examine the distinct needs of the organic food industry.

The work group will also discuss the results of two surveys conducted by WSDA in May. One, involving the state's commodity commissions, indicates that some favor having an organic program within existing commission structures, while others are open to continued discussions. The other survey, involving 535 certified organic producers, shows that those who already pay assessments to a commodity commission are interested in redirecting their assessments to an organic commission. Those who do not pay assessments are not interested in forming a commission or paying assessments.

Organic farming and processing continues to increase in Washington. In 2001, the state's organic producers generated \$47 million in sales from 40,000 acres. Thousands more acres are under transition from conventional farming to organic. There are more than 800 certified organic farmers, handlers and processors in the state, producing organic fruits, vegetables, grains, herbs, and many other commodities and food products.

Questions about the surveys or the Organic Food Commission Work Group may be directed to Miles McEvoy by phone at (360) 902-1924 or e-mail [mmcevoy@agr.wa.gov](mailto:mmcevoy@agr.wa.gov); or Deborah Anderson, Administrative Regulations Program, at (360) 902-2043 or [danderson@agr.wa.gov](mailto:danderson@agr.wa.gov). For copies of the surveys, visit the department's Web site at <http://www.wa.gov/agr/FoodAnimal/Organic/comproj.htm>.

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